

Quaker Ties Embarrass Nixon

By Marjorie Hyer

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President Nixon's Quaker heritage is proving an increasing source of embarrassment to him as some Quakers around the country call formally for his impeachment or resignation.

There is no way of knowing precisely how many of the approximately 800 Religious Society of Friends meetings, or churches, in the United States, have taken or are considering such actions. Each meeting acts independently and is not required to report its actions to any national authority.

The Washington-based Friends Committee on National Legislation, however, knows of 20 Friends meetings that have formally acted to call for impeachment or resignation of the President.

In Quaker practice, formal action taken by a group reflects the complete agreement of every person present, since Quakers act on an issue only where there is full consensus rather than relying on majority vote.

Some meetings, like the Plainfield, Vt., monthly meeting, have taken their concern directly to the President.

"... Although we feel there is little hope our letter will reach you personally, we feel compelled to send it in the hope that we may reach out to the spirit within you," they wrote in late November.

"We are profoundly disappointed by the massive evidence accruing of your dishonesty, deception, disregard for the law and betrayal of the Constitution," the meeting continued.

"We ask you to look deeply within yourself for guidance about your continuance in office and your spiritual well-being."

The Stamford-Greenwich, Conn., monthly meeting also communicated their concern to their fellow-Quaker, appealing "to you directly, Richard Nixon, as one who has on various occasions referred to your Quaker background and hence may be expected to respect the traditional testimonies of the society."

"It seems to us that serious discrepancies exist between three testimonials and the actions which you have either taken or for which you may be considered responsible."

Citing seven specifics, including obstruction of Watergate investigations and the offering of "a high federal post" to Judge W. Matt Byrne Jr. while he was presiding over the Ellsberg trial, the letter continued: "In view of the above we urge you to resign."

"We feel tender toward you in the moral dilemma in which you have placed yourself and sympathy with you in your pain. However difficult your resignation may be to you personally, it would aid in dispell-

ing the atmosphere of corruption in our national government," the letter concluded.

Most of the actions by Friends meetings, whether addressed directly to the President or to members of Congress, expressed concern for President Nixon as a person.

"We support the spirit of the person of Richard Nixon," declared the Adelphi, Md., meeting. "But we support the spirit of constitutional law."

Like other meetings, Adelphi Quakers called on their representatives in Congress to "begin forthwith impeachment proceedings, noting well that the call for impeachment is simply to bring to light the truth from current confusion."

President Nixon's troubles with his fellow Quakers, particularly the traditionalists who adhere to the Friends peace testimony, began with his vigorous prosecution of the war in Vietnam.

At one point, a Philadelphia antiwar Quaker group publicly challenged the President either to live up to Quaker principles or stop calling himself one.

Other Quakers — as individuals — urged the East Whittier, Calif., Friends Church to invoke a long-dormant Friends practice and revoke his membership for what they felt was his failure to live up to Quaker principles.

The church repeatedly declined such actions. Most re-

cently, on Dec. 14, the official board of the church voted a formal resolution "to advise that he [Richard Nixon] is and has been for many years" a member of the church and stating that his affiliation would "continue."

The revelations of Watergate and related actions have pushed numerous Friends to overt action. While individual Quakers complained about their most famous co-religionist in the past, formal censure by entire meetings is something new.

Stanly Berkemeyer, clerk of the Langley Hill Meeting in McLean, said the action taken by her meeting on Oct. 21 was triggered by what she termed the "weekend massacre" the night before the Cox-Richardson-Ruckelshaus departure from government service.

"Our meeting is full of people who work in government," said Mrs. Berkemeyer. "We are aware of the compromises that must be made in politics."

The resolution, which calls on Congress "to clean the house of government and restore the rule of law," cites "the collapse of the moral leadership in the executive branch" and "repeated violations of the constitutional principle that no man, not even the President, can be above the law."

"We leaned over backwards," Mrs. Berkemeyer explained, "to try not to be holier than thou."